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**REMARKS BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR MARCIA BERNICAT
AT COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY**

**ASIAN UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN - CHITTAGONG
May 21, 2015**

Visiting dignitaries,

Distinguished Guest Chancellor Cherie Blair,

Dedicated administrators, trustee board members, and faculty,

Accomplished alumni,

Proud parents and friends, and

Members of the Asian University for Women Class of 2015,

Congratulations to all of you!

I am extremely honored that you have invited me to celebrate this very special occasion with you; to hail your achievements and wish you well as you embark upon the next stage of your lives and careers. This is my first visit to Chittagong and what better evidence of this mighty city's contribution to Bangladesh's intellectual and cultural richness than all of you assembled here on this fine summer morning!

Being here today also gives me the opportunity to recognize the noble mission of the Asian University for Women that, in a few short years, has set a new standard for preparing smart, ambitious and hard-working young women to assume positions of leadership in Bangladesh, throughout Asia and across the globe!

The United States is proud to count itself among AUW's supporters. One example of our support is the partnership between AUW and the U.S. Department of State to create a pipeline of

talented young women to serve in Bangladesh's law enforcement and criminal justice institutions, as a way both to support women's inclusion in this critical sector and increase overall capacity. AUW has also partnered with the United States to support the enrollment of female students from Afghanistan whose vital voices for positive change will join the voices of fellow AUW graduates advancing the role of women throughout the region.

Today, we are here to celebrate each of you 115 extraordinary graduates from 12 countries. We know our world will be a better place because of your commitment to inspire, educate and empower others. I invite all of the guests here today to please join me in giving a big round of applause to these remarkable young women and their extraordinary accomplishments! Commencement speakers are expected to offer profound and entertaining words of wisdom to the graduates, but I suspect a good part of what I am about to say you already know.

You know how very proud of you we all are. Just look at all of these admiring professors, staff, family members and friends! Those who know you well – and those of us who only know of you – share your sense of accomplishment, and honor you for your perseverance and success in reaching this milestone.

You know that everyone here today is experiencing an unusual range of emotions, especially your proud families and friends. You and those who support you have worked tirelessly to make this day possible, and yet you must also know that your work as young adults, in many ways, is just beginning!

You know also that AUW's dedicated professors, administrators and staff have devoted themselves to empowering you with the knowledge and technical tools you will rely on to navigate your careers.

You know as well that you have learned many valuable life lessons from your classmates here at AUW who represent the breadth of Asia and the globe. One of AUW's core beliefs is that the world's problems can be solved and great advancements can be made that benefit all of humanity when diverse peoples are brought together, setting the foundation for the world-class education you have received here.

Each of you has brought your unique cultural experiences and perspectives to your learning and your interactions with each other. You stand far more ready than most of your counterparts around the world to live in, and contribute to, the successful future of our ever-shrinking world. Your cultural diversity has given you the tools to build a better community and a better world.

AUW's mission also values service, and calls upon each of you to seek success through contributing to the greater good, to use your tremendous talents and skills to spark transformative change that leaves the world a better place than when you found it.

During my more than 30 years as a diplomat with the U.S. Department of State, I have been privileged – and professionally fulfilled – by the service I have been able to give to others. This has been a fascinating and rewarding journey, from my earliest days as a young Political Officer to being appointed twice as Ambassador, first to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. Now I have the honor of representing President Obama and the American people to Bangladesh. But the world was a much different place when, as a young woman, I sat where you are sitting, with many obstacles to overcome.

Over the decades, we have come to better understand some very important facts. Global stability, peace, and prosperity depend on protecting and advancing the rights of women and girls around the world. Research shows that progress in women's employment, health, and education can lead to greater economic growth and stronger societies. Evidence demonstrates that integrating women's perspectives into peace negotiations and security efforts helps prevent conflict and can lead to more durable peace agreements. And when women and men are equally empowered as political and social actors, governments are more representative and effective. The United States joins allies around the world in promoting global progress towards gender equality, and advancing the rights of women and girls.

What an extraordinary time this is for you 115 young women to be setting out to make your mark on the world! Yes, the world community continues to face problems that seem insurmountable – among them poverty, disease, poor governance, lack of education, rising extremism in different parts of the world and ignorance that threaten women's status and safety. But I maintain that there has never been a better time to be a woman in this vast world. And yes, many nations in this region are challenged with how to sustainably improve their citizens' quality of life, but I contend that there has also never been a better time to be born in South, Central or East Asia. This is especially true for Bangladesh, the country that had the vision to give a home to this unique educational institution, and a nation on the brink of achieving middle-income status.

The U.S.-Bangladesh relationship is one of America's most important. And we are proud to have been a partner in the unprecedented strides in health, food security, and poverty reduction Bangladesh has made in its short history as an independent country.

Government-to- government ties are important, but we should recognize they play a supporting role for something even more impressive . . . the strong and organic people-to-people ties that continue to lead and define strong bilateral relationships around the world and drive enduring partnerships forward.

Speaking of people-to-people ties, here we are gathered this morning – from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Canada, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, Vietnam, and the United States – all celebrating the commitment to scholarship, service and leadership that you as new graduates embody!

And remembering that this is a commencement speech, I do feel obligated to share a few of those inspirational thoughts we have come to expect on this occasion! I drew my inspiration in part from columnist Regina Brett who writes for a regional newspaper in the United States and is a New York Times bestselling author. I urge you to look her up on the Internet when you have a moment because every one of the "45 Life Lessons and 5 to Grow On" that she offered back in 2006 are truly worth keeping in mind. I'll list just a few of my favorite life lessons this morning:

Number 48 on the list is a good place to start: "If you don't ask, you don't get." This sounds like a very self-serving piece of advice, but it may be extremely useful to those of you who will be seeking your first professional job. As a supervisor for many years, I can attest to the fact that if you do not ask for the best effort from your employees, you are less likely to get it -- they may not even know exactly what you want if you don't give them sufficient detail at the beginning of a task and helpful guidance along the way. The same goes for being an employee. If, after securing a position, you want to have more responsibility, or greater input, or different work conditions, don't expect your boss or your co-workers to know unless you ask for what you need. And for all of us, aren't we prone to sometimes anticipate an answer or expect that things must be done the way they always have been done? You can obtain amazing results by challenging assumptions or starting with the question, "what if . . . ?"

Closely related to "if you don't ask you don't get" is having the confidence to stand up, speak out, and be heard. Demonstrating responsibility, being accountable, and taking ownership are critically important skills to acquire. In many places we are witnessing rising courage on the part of more women speaking out against violence. I say "Bravo to their bravery!" And it is so encouraging to see that. These girls' and women's voices are garnering support and giving courage to others to stand up, speak out, and be heard.

Number 45 on the Regina Brett list states definitively: “The best is yet to come.” In spite of how many extraordinary or sublime moments you have been fortunate to have in your life, surely you can believe that statement today, degree in hand, armed with new knowledge and new resolve. But I implore you to feel that way every day. There is always more to reach for, more to do, more to experience, and more to be grateful for. By now you have probably ascertained that I am an optimist, and I have never ceased to be amazed at how much easier it is to obtain a goal when I expected to obtain it.

Finally, I will end with life lesson Number 10: “When it comes to chocolate, resistance is futile.” For me, anyway! Chocolate is one of the best motivators I have ever found, and knowing what motivates you will help you keep going on the days you may feel too tired or too discouraged to continue.

A number of Ms. Brett’s life lessons revolve around seeing beauty, doing what pleases you and embracing the joy of living. I can have no greater wish for all of you today!

Congratulations, Asian University for Women Class of 2015!

Thank you.

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**As prepared for delivery*